

Message Text

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L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 ACDA-12
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3508

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY

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USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 23006

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EG IS XF

SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN REACTION TO ISMAILIA SUMMIT

SUMMARY. PRIVATE EGYPTIAN REACTION TO ISMAILIA SUMMIT
VARIES FROM PESSIMISM TO RESERVING JUDGMENT. BUOYANT
OPTIMISM IS GONE. MAJORITY OF EGYPTIANS CLEARLY BELIEVE
BEGIN HAS GIVEN VERY LITTLE AND MANY CALL IT A FAILURE.
OTHERS ADMIT EGYPTIAN EXPECTATIONS WERE UNREALISTICALLY
HIGH AND THAT TIME REQUIRED TO SOLVE THIRTY-YEAR-OLD
PROBLEM. U.S. ROLE IN CRACKING PALESTINIAN/WEST BANK
NOT CONSIDERED VITAL. ONLY TINY MINORITY RECOGNIZED
BEGIN'S CONCESSIONS. SENIOR MFA OFFICIAL CRITICIZES
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SADAT FOR STRICTLY IMPROVISING. IN ANY CASE, EGYPTIANS
ARE NOW FORCED TO TAKE MORE REALISTIC VIEW OF DISTANCE
SEPARATING PARTIES AND DIFFICULTY AND TIME REQUIRED TO RE-
SOLVE THEM. END SUMMARY.

1. UNLIKE TODAY'S PRESS REACTION TO ISMAILIA SUMMIT
(SEPTTEL), WHICH IS UNIFORMLY DEFENSIVE ("YOU CAN'T SOLVE

THIRTY-YEAR-OLD PROBLEM IN TWENTY-FOUR HOURS") AND STOIC ("NEGOTIATIONS WILL CONTINUE"), PRIVATE EGYPTIAN REACTIONS VARY FROM OUTRIGHT PESSIMISM TO MORE WIDESPREAD WILLINGNESS TO RESERVE JUDGMENT. GONE, HOWEVER, IS BUOYANT OPTIMISM OF PAST WEEK. FOLLOWING ARE MAIN THEMES WE HAVE GARNERED IN QUICK SURVEY OF MFA OFFICIALS, JOURNALISTS, UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS, TWO LABOR LEADERS AND ONE SENIOR MILITARY OFFICER.

2. "IT WASN'T ENOUGH". WITH FEW EXCEPTIONS, THERE IS CONSENSUS THAT BEGIN GAVE VERY LITTLE. THIS PARTICULARLY TRUE OF SOME JOURNALISTS WHO COVERED CONFERENCE AND WERE BITTER WITH BEGIN. EVEN ON SINAI, WHERE TODAY'S PRESS LEAKS HINTED ISRAELIS WOULD AGREE TO TOTAL WITHDRAWAL, EGYPTIANS BELIEVE THIS NOT A CONCESSION BUT EXPECTED SINAI QUA NON FOR SETTLEMENT. ONE LABOR LEADER EXPRESSED "DEEP DISAPPOINTMENT" WHICH HE THOUGHT WAS ALSO CLEAR FROM SADAT'S DEMEANOR DURING PRESS CONFERENCE. UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS SPOKE OF "FAILURE", "DISAPPOINTMENT" AND "NOTHING FOR US". MORE KNOWLEDGEABLE MFA OFFICIALS DID NOT CONCEAL DISAPPOINTMENT BUT PREFERRED TO RESERVE JUDGMENT. LOOKING ON BRIGHT SIDE, SENIOR LEVEL MFA OFFICIAL SAID SUMMIT RESULTS SHOULD AT LEAST PROVE TO OTHER ARABS THAT SADAT NOT SEEKING SEPARATE DEAL SINCE BASIC DIFFERENCES WERE OVER PALESTINIANS AND WEST BANK.

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3. REALISTICALLY HIGH EXPECTATIONS DASHED. MANY JOURNALISTS, PERHAPS PICKING UP WHAT APPEARS TO BE OFFICIAL GUIDANCE, BLAMED MEDIA FOR RAISING PEOPLE'S EXPECTATIONS TO UNREALISTIC HEIGHTS THUS MAKING DISAPPOINTMENT INEVITABLE. THEY AND SOME OFFICIALS NOW SAYING THAT, GIVEN FACT IT ONLY OPENING OF NEGOTIATIONS AND TOUGH ISRAELI REPUTATION FOR BARGAINING, SUMMIT OUTCOME WAS AS EXPECTED. ROSE EL YOUSSEF EDITOR BRAGGED TO PRESS OFFICER THAT HIS PUBLICATION ALONE HAD CAREFULLY NOT CONTRIBUTED TO HIGH EXPECTATIONS.

4. TIME WILL BE REQUIRED. SENIOR MILITARY OFFICER, PERHAPS REFLECTING MOST HARD-NOSED VIEW, CLAIMED TO NAVATT THAT EVERYTHING GOING ACCORDING TO SCHEDULE AND OBVIOUSLY MUCH TIME WILL BE REQUIRED TO WORK OUT THESE COMPLICATED ISSUES IN POLITICAL AND MILITARY COMMITTEES. (IN UNSOLICITED COMMENT, HE STRONGLY CRITICIZED PLO AS OBSTACLE TO SETTLEMENT SINCE THEY "PREFER TO STAY ABROAD AND MILK OTHERS".) EVEN MANY OF DISAPPOINTED EXPRESS HOPE THAT NOW THAT SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS ARE BEGINNING, COMPREHENSIVE AGREEMENT CAN BE WORKED OUT. MIN LABOR TOLD LRO THAT SUMMIT HAD MADE GREAT PROGRESS AND THAT, WHILE NEGOTIATIONS

WILL BE SLOW AND DIFFICULT, CHANCES FOR A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT ARE GOOD.

5. U.S. ROLE VITAL. MINLABOR ADDED, ALONG WITH MANY OTHER OF OUR INTERLOCUTORS THAT WEST BANK/PALESTINE PROBLEM OBVIOUSLY TOUGHEST TO CRACK AND U.S. ROLE WILL BE VITAL IN INFLUENCING ISRAEL TO REACH SETTLEMENT. SENIOR MFA OFFICIAL

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EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT U.S. HAD BEEN LEFT OUT OF MILITARY COMMITTEE, HE ASSUMED AT ISRAEL'S URGING.

6. ISRAELI CONCESSIONS. SMALL MINORITY OF TWO (BOTH MFA OFFICIALS) CONCEDED THAT, IN ISRAELI DOMESTIC POLITICAL CONTEXT, BEGIN HAD MADE SOME IMPORTANT CONCESSIONS AND THOUGHT MORE TIME NEEDED FOR HIM TO GO FURTHER. BOTH BELIEVED THAT BEGIN'S WILLINGNESS TO DO SO WILL DEPEND ON U.S. ABILITY TO MOVE HIM ON WEST BANK AND PALESTINIAN ISSUES.

7. CRITICISM OF SADAT. SENIOR MFA OFFICIAL HIGHLY
CRITICAL OF SADAT FOR "STRICTLY IMPROVISING". BRAVADO
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CANNOT, IN HIS VIEW, SUBSTITUTE FOR WELL THOUGHT-OUT
NEGOTIATING TACTICS. SADAT, HE CLAIMS, HAS NO REAL AD-
VISERS AND IS SURROUNDED WITH SYCOPHANTS (E.G. "EGYPTIAN
DELEGATION TO CAIRO CONFERENCE NEVER DID RECEIVE ANY
INSTRUCTIONS.") FURTHERMORE, SADAT'S CONCESSIONS TO
ISRAEL HAVE MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR BEGIN TO MOVE SLIGHTLY
FORWARD WHILE STRENGTHENING SUPPORT OF PRINCIPAL CON-
STITUENCIES (ISRAELI/AMERICAN PUBLIC). WHEREAS SADAT BY
IMPROVISING AND PLAYING FOR THE GRANDSTAND RISKS LOSING
SOME OF HIS MOST IMPORTANT CONSTITUENCIES, (MODERATE ARABS
AND SOME EGYPTIANS). IN THIS OFFICIAL'S VIEW, EGYPTIAN
PEOPLE FERVENTLY WANT REAL PEACE AND THEY ARE BEING TOLD
IT IS COMING. IN FACT, HOWEVER, THEY ARE BEING TOLD HALF
TRUTHS (E.G. AHRAM REPORT OF ISRAELI AGREEMENT IN PRINCI-
PLE TO TOTAL WITHDRAWAL FROM SINAI FAILS TO MENTION ISRAELI
CONDITIONS REGARDING AIR BASES AND SETTLEMENTS). THIS
OFFICIAL ALSO CRITICIZED ESTABLISHMENT OF POLITICAL AND
MILITARY COMMITTEES SINCE IN FACT THERE WAS AT THIS POINT
NO BASIS FOR CONTINUING DISCUSSIONS. IT WOULD HAVE
BEEN BETTER FOR SADAT, AFTER POLITELY SAYING
ISRAEL HAS NOT YET TAKEN HARD DECISIONS (AS HE DID), TO
ADD THAT TALKS COULD NOT CONTINUE UNTIL IT DID SO.

8. COMMENT. MAJORITY OF EGYPTIANS HAD APPARENTLY NOT
FOCUSSED ON SPECIFICS OF NEGOTIATIONS BUT WERE CAUGHT UP
IN EUPHORIA THAT REAL PEACE WAS ON HORIZON. THEY NOW GOING
TO BE FORCED TO TAKE A MORE REALISTIC VIEW OF HOW FAR
APART TWO SIDES ARE. WE WILL BE CAREFULLY MONITORING
WHETHER UNDER THESE CONDITIONS SADAT IS ABLE TO MAINTAIN
THE NEAR UNIVERSAL SUPPORT HIS PEACE INITIATIVES
HAVE ENGENDERED UNTIL NOW. EILTS

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